

# The Christian Hope

J. R. W. STOTT\*

“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen” (Rev. 22:20-21, RSV).

The Church of the New Testament is standing on tiptoe. It is leaning and looking forward. It is peering into the darkness of the unknown future. Its eyes are straining to pierce through the mists which veil Christ from our sight. The Church is quick to catch the shout from heaven, “I am coming soon,” and quick to send the echo racing back, “Even so, Come, Lord Jesus!”

The Church’s expectation for the future is very different from the world’s. The Bible teaches three truths:

1. *There will be an end.* History is not the record of a purposeless, patternless activity. History has a goal.

2. *This end will be sudden.* Philosophers who have applied the doctrine of evolution to the realm of man’s spirit believe in a gradual moral and spiritual progress. Christianity also believes in progress, but knows that the end will be sudden.

3. *This sudden end will be a divine act.* God will step in. Christ will return and take over. Worldly hopes center on man’s progress. The Christian hope centers on Christ’s return. What more complete contrast could be imagined? It is the contrast between an endless evolution by the wit of man and a sudden intervention by the will of God. This is the Christian hope.

## IT IS A SURE HOPE

The word “hope” suggests the opposite. None of our common hopes is sure. In English the word means the “expectation of something desired” (Oxford Dictionary). The Greek word, however, means a “joyful and con-

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fident expectation.” What is the significant difference? It is this. Ordinary hopes originate in our own desire. The Christian hope originates in Christ’s own promise. I “hope” it will be fine in the holidays because I want it to be. But I “hope” Christ will return because He said He would. In this case it is not our wish that is father to the thought, but Christ’s word. “He who testifies to these things says ‘I am coming shortly.’” He said it repeatedly during His earthly lifetime. He says it three times in this chapter (vv.7, 12, 20). He says it forcefully, too. He prefaces His word with a strong affirmation “Surely.” Let the world scoff and the critics argue. Jesus Christ has said, “I am coming,” and this is enough to make the humble Christian sure.

### IT IS A NEAR HOPE

Christ says not only, “I am coming,” but, “I am coming *soon*.” It is popularly supposed by many that Jesus Christ and His apostles were mistaken about the time of His return. This is a grave allegation. We believe that the evidence is capable of a different interpretation. Here are the reasons.

1. Jesus foretold many future events—His death and resurrection, His gift of the Spirit, the destruction of Jerusalem, the spread of the Gospel and the growth of the Church, great tribulation and His return in glory. With that foreshortening of vision which is a characteristic of predictive prophecy, many of these events are telescoped into one another and cannot be clearly distinguished from one another.

2. Some of His teaching implied the lapse of a considerable period before His return. For instance, in the Parable of the Talents the householder who entrusted his property to his servants and went on a journey, only returned “after a long time” (Matt. 25:19).

3. In the program He described before the end, much was to take place. There would be political unrest and moral anarchy, intellectual confusion and evangelistic activity. During this lengthy period He distinctly says, “these are the beginnings of sorrows. . . the end is not yet.”

Then why say He will return “soon”? Is the word not misleading and even inaccurate? No. The New Testament emphasis is on the sudden unexpectedness of His return. The Church of every age must watch and so be ready. If each generation is to prepare for His return, each generation must expect it. It is the suddenness of the return which explains its “soonness.”

### IT IS A DEAR HOPE

We cannot study the subject with cold-blooded interest. This statement of Jesus sets the chords of the heart vibrating. It awakens an immediate response. The promise of Jesus, “I am coming,” arouses the Church’s answering prayer, “Even so, Come!” Why do we want Him to come?

1. *For His sake.* We detect this reason in His title “*Lord Jesus*.”

He is already Lord, but not yet has every knee bowed to Him. Not yet has every tongue confessed Him Lord. Every Christian longs to see Him universally honored and adored.

2. *For our sakes, too.* The Spirit who came to prepare the Church as a Bride for Christ, and the Church thus prepared for Him, pine for the Bridegroom's return. Interminably long has seemed the Bride's betrothal. Separated from her Lover and persecuted by His foes, she faints with expectation for the marriage feast of the Lamb. The individual Christian takes up the refrain, yearning to see His face and hear His voice. "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let him who hears say, 'Come' " (v.17).

Can we add our "Amen" to the invitation, "Come, Lord Jesus"? If so, the last verse of all the Bible will be ours to enjoy: "the grace of the Lord Jesus be with you, Amen." This final promise has its Amen, too, for the present grace of Jesus is as sure as His future glory. Indeed, until His glory is revealed, His grace will prove sufficient. Amen and Amen!